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ROOOOOSHA

Veteran Brown a major force for WNBA's Rockers



Rushia Brown averaged 8.3 points and 4.4 rebounds per game for the Eastern Division champs last season.

For the first time in five years, Rushia Brown took a vacation this fall. She made time to read, visit friends and family, travel to Jamaica and, in her words, "do absolutely nothing."

The rest and relaxation were well deserved. Since the Women's National Basketball Association began in 1997, Brown's life has been a whirlwind of globetrotting, hoops and hard courts.

During the last five years, Brown has split her time between the Cleveland Rockers and a bevy of European teams. By the time the WNBA season ended each year in late August, she already had her flight booked to Europe, where she would play until the end of April. Then she'd head back to Cleveland to prepare for the start of the Rockers' season, which typically begins in mid-May.

That's about 70 games a year. And this August, after the Rockers were upset in the first round of the WNBA playoffs by the Charlotte Sting, Brown knew that, at 29, her body was feeling the stress from her nonstop schedule.

"I had a lot of nagging injuries that were bothering me," says Brown, a 1994 Furman graduate. "I just needed some rest."

So, for the first time in five years, Brown decided to follow women's basketball in Europe through the Internet. But she says she will likely join a team in February, when many squads make roster adjustments.

"I can't stay away that long," says Brown. "I love the game too much."

Brown, a four-time member of the All-Southern Conference team, holds Furman records in career points (2,169), scoring average (19.0), field goals (908), field goal percentage (.591), blocked shots (193) and steals (338).

Since her student days, the Summerville, S.C., native has enjoyed a productive — and educational — career. She has played for teams in France, Spain and Italy, experiences that have enhanced her language skills. And with the Rockers, she has ridden the WNBA roller coaster.

In 1997, the Rockers were one of the top teams in the league. Then, after

a couple of lean years, they returned to elite status in 2001 under second-year coach Dan Hughes, winning the Eastern Division with a 22-10 record.

Brown, a frequent starter at forward, is a favorite among the team's fans, who show their appreciation by shouting "ROOOOOSHA" when she enters the game or makes an outstanding play. On the court, she is known for aggressive defense (she generally draws the toughest assignment), steady leadership and solid offense.

"Rushia, in my opinion, is the most underrated player in this league," says Hughes. "She has had an enormous impact on our team and played a big role in our success the past two seasons."

Brown is the oldest person on a very young team. Hughes says, "The younger girls really look up to her and learn from her. She's a vocal player who can communicate with all players regardless of their age."

Brown, who shrugs off such compliments, has a healthy approach to her job. "Basketball has given me the opportunity to travel overseas, see other places and expand my horizons," she says. "Being a part of the WNBA from the beginning has been incredible. It's fantastic that girls can come out and play in front of 15,000 people. But while basketball is great, I have other things that I want to do after basketball."

Carter to step down at end of school year

Sherry Carter, head women's basketball coach at Furman for the last 20 years, announced her resignation September 25, effective at the close of the school year.

"With appreciation for her 20 years as the women's basketball coach, we accept Coach Carter's decision to leave Furman," said Gary Clark, director of athletics. "She successfully led the program from the NAIA ranks to the NCAA Division I level, and we are grateful for her efforts. We wish her well not only during the upcoming season, but with her new endeavors."

Clark said that the department would give its full support to the Lady Paladins during the 2001-02 season and that maintaining a successful women's basketball program is of the highest priority.

"Since Coach Carter has let us know her intentions now, it will allow us to make the smoothest transition possible," he said. "It will also give us the opportunity to focus on the job at hand, which is to win the Southern Conference championship this year and plan for the 2002-03 season."

Clark said that Furman would conduct a national search for a new coach and that it was the university's goal to name a successor to Carter shortly after the conclusion of the 2001-02 season.

Carter became head coach in 1982. After spending her first two seasons leading the team at the NAIA level, she oversaw the Lady Paladins' move to Division I during the 1984-85 season. Entering this season, she has a record of 283-242 at Furman and a 122-95 mark in Southern Conference play. Her teams won the league tournament and berths in the NCAA tournament in 1995 and 2000, and she has led the Lady Paladins to four regular-season conference titles.

Carter has been Southern Conference Coach of the Year three times and is a winner of Furman's J. Lyles Alley Coach of the Year Award. She has been chair of the Southern Conference Basketball Committee since 1991 and is a contributing member of the Women's Basketball Coaches Association.

A sociology major at Furman, she hopes to earn a master's degree and work as a child psychologist. But she's not planning to hang up the high-tops just yet.

"I'm going to do this as long as I am physically able," she says. "I am doing something I love. If I were working nine to five, I would be fighting to get on the court."

— John Roberts